

On Anniversary of Geneva Conventions, President Obama Should End U.S. Violations and Lift Abortion Ban on Humanitarian Aid

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New York, NY – Sixty-five years ago today the United States signed the Geneva Conventions. It is a shame the U.S. now violates the rights of girls and women raped in armed conflict under the Conventions by denying them access to safe abortion services in humanitarian zones.

As the Global Justice Center (GJC) stated [in an open letter to President Obama released today](#), the White House has the power to right this egregious wrong through executive action; yet the President has inexplicably failed to do so thus far. To ensure the U.S. is in compliance with the Geneva Conventions, President Obama can and should issue an executive order restoring the rape, incest and life endangerment exceptions to U.S. abortion restrictions on foreign aid and ensure the rights of women and girls in conflict zones around the world under the Geneva Conventions.

In the [letter](#), GJC President Janet Benshoof writes, “Commendably, the US is the largest humanitarian aid donor in the world; however, for those women and girls who become pregnant from war rape, US aid extends, rather than alleviates, their suffering.”

GJC was the first organization to point out the U.S.’ failure to adhere to the common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which provides non-discriminatory medical care guarantees for the “wounded and sick” in armed conflict. For girls and women raped in war, this includes abortion. Instead, due to an overly restrictive interpretation of the Helms Amendment, U.S. policy forces young girls and women impregnated through brutal war rape to risk their lives to bear the child of their rapists by denying them access to safe abortion services. This can mean a death sentence for many of them, especially since more than half of rape victims in armed conflict are children.

Leading an international effort to ensure access to safe abortion services for war rape victims globally, GJC started the *August 12th Campaign*, its name serving as a reminder to the U.S. of its obligations under the Geneva Conventions. Since 2011, the Campaign has gathered letters representing over 3,500 groups sent to the White House urging President Obama to lift the abortion restrictions. In addition, several countries and the European Parliament have joined GJC in calling for an end to this inhumane policy.

But the most powerful letters are from women on the ground in conflict zones every day, including one from Justine Masika Bihamba, co-founder of Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes de Violences Sexuelles (Women’s Synergie for Victims of Sexual Violence), the Congo-based organization that works to support and empower survivors of sexual violence in conflict. In Ms. Bihamba’s words, the U.S. abortion restrictions “represent an impediment to equal justice for girls and women raped in conflict” and she urges the U.S. to “stop inflicting additional harm to these vulnerable victims.”

We hope President Obama is listening to the voices of these women. He has the moral and legal duty to lift the abortion restrictions through the power of his pen and restore their rights.

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